

## Keyboarding Tips for Parents

There is much debate in the field of educational technology about when to introduce and promote keyboarding for children. Keyboarding research indicates, like most skills, some individuals have natural ability and others struggle a bit more to become competent at using the keyboard. Idiosyncratic (individual) styles often develop; they may not interfere with a person's ability to be accurate and efficient.

There is a natural progression of appropriate keyboarding skills for learners depending upon their age and experience. When young children use programs that require them to use the keyboard rather than the mouse, they benefit from guidance. *Preschool, kindergarten and first grader students* should be taught and reminded to have good posture and use one hand on each side of the keyboard. The keyboard is challenging for youngsters until they read, match and understand upper and lower case letters. Common issues include the distinction between making a lower case "l" using the upper case "I" on the keyboard, finding the correct capital letter for p,d,q, and b (commonly reversed in young children) and how to make a capital letter. Simple games that reinforce letter recognition skills are important. A great online site for developing those skills is at [www.starfall.com](http://www.starfall.com). (*All children benefit from adult monitoring, especially when they first use any online program.*)

We begin introducing *Type to Learn 4*, an online, language-based keyboarding program, at the end of second grade, although some children may be ready sooner. We believe that keyboarding, like learning math facts, requires consistent and appropriately leveled practice. Fifteen - twenty minutes per day, five days a week for an extended period of time is much more effective than an hour once a week. Reminders to use their new skills when *when typing for any reason*, will ensure primary aged learners' success.

What follows are important skills for children in different grades:

*2nd & 3rd Graders* - good posture, focus on hands on the home-row keys, using the thumb for spacebar, opposite pinkie on the shift key (rather than Caps Lock), and using both hands (at all times) on the keyboard. They should know the home-row keys by the end of a semester of structured practice. Younger students may start having trouble touch typing (without looking) at the fourth lesson.

*4th and 5th Graders* - same foci, however they should start slowing down to learn to make the correct reaches of more frequently used letters without looking, develop their use of the numbers, punctuation and special characters, as well as improve their accuracy. With intermittent "refreshers" of consistent, short intervals of practice on a typing program, many fourth and fifth graders can become quite proficient keyboarders.

For *middle grade students*, accuracy continues to be the primary objective, speed should continue to increase. Students are tempted to rush through the lessons rather than try to type accurately. A "refresher" month of brief, consistent practice on a typing program is helpful. Again, basic skills should include good posture, focus on hands on the home-row keys, using the thumb for spacebar, opposite pinkie on the shift key (rather than Caps Lock), and using both hands (at all times) on the keyboard. Efficient reaches, using the numbers, punctuation and special characters, should become automatic.

Check the *Type to Learn 4 Parent Manual* (download on the *Friday Flyer*) to find information on why keyboard, how to use the program, proper keyboarding technique, a skill rubric (checklist) for keyboarding, ergonomic exercises and a student self-evaluation rubric.

Please contact Karen Ortiz at [kortiz@graland.org](mailto:kortiz@graland.org) or [rick.hum@earthlink.net](mailto:rick.hum@earthlink.net) (summer) if you have any questions or would like your child's lesson number reset to a lower lesson.